



**Children and Family Services
Training Center**
Department of Social Work
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Fostering Communications



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Building a Network of People in the Foster Care System

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“Lost Boys of Sudan” find family homes in North Dakota

By Del Hager

The Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program of Lutheran Social Services - North Dakota (LSSND), through the Center For New Americans in Fargo, is finding and supporting foster families for an incredibly resilient group of young boys. The Lost Boys of Sudan, named after Peter Pan's group of orphans, are from the Dinka and Nuer Tribes of Southern Sudan in Northeastern Africa.

Their History

Since civil war broke out in Sudan in 1983, more than five million people have been displaced, including some 26,000 children, mostly boys, and approximately two million have been killed. The battle has been between the government led Arab/Islamic forces from Khartoum in the north and mostly Christians in the south. The government troops wiped out families and villages, killed the animals and made slaves of the girls. In the late 1980's the war finally forced the boys to flee in all directions amid the gunfire and bloodshed.

They walked tremendous distances through a vast wilderness that left many children so weak from starvation and dehydration that they fell beside the roadside and became prey for lions. Occasionally, Red Cross helicopters dropped food and water but little other support could be provided because of the gunfire.

After about two months of walking and running, the boys entered Ethiopia where they were to spend the next three years in refugee camps. In 1991, government troops forced them by gunfire to flee Ethiopia at the River Gilo where thousands were murdered, drowned or killed by crocodiles. The

survivors (approximately 10,000) pushed on into Sudan once again, and after a year, found themselves at Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. The walk had taken them more than 1200 miles.

The Kakuma camp was populated with about 65,000 refugees from seven African countries. The United Nations and the Red Cross tried to provide for them but rations were limited. Temperatures into the 120's with lows in the 90's are the norm in this region. The boys were generally between the ages of 8 and 18 but most of them did not know their actual age and were given an approximate age by camp workers.

Their exposure to violence was documented while at the camp. A journalist wrote that up to 85% saw someone die from starvation; up to 92% said they were shot at; and, 97% witnessed a killing. The boys have been described as “among the most badly war-traumatized children ever examined.”

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Staff at the Center for New Americans from l to r: Paul Fuglestad, Blair Hill, Katie Behrend, Resa Schmidt and Thomas Brown Taban.

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Coming to America

In 1999, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, (UNHCR) working with the U. S. Department of State, decided that approximately 3800 of the Lost Boys of Sudan could be resettled in this country. LSSND is one of eighteen approved resettlement sites in the United States. To date, the Center for New Americans, Unaccompanied Refugee Minor program in Fargo has accepted 19 Lost Boys (and one lost girl), with numerous others served by LSSND in the Fargo community.

URM's are defined as "children (under the age of 18) who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so." Once a child is designated as a refugee in their own country, they are given a number while at the refugee camp that corresponds to their placement status. They might be coming to America to live under one of four classifications: with a family member; with a close relative; with another adult from their native region; or, they may not have any connection at all, which would then classify them as "destined for foster care." Children can also become unaccompanied after arrival in the U.S. if the parent or caregiver can no longer care for the child once they are present in the U.S. The latter situation is referred to as "family breakdown cases."

Paul Fuglestad, Unaccompanied Refugee Minor program director, stated that when a youth comes to the United States designated with URM status, a foster care placement is determined, intensive case management is assigned, and, an education program is put in place to secure the best interests and welfare of the child. He also said that some of their foster families are relatives and/or members of the same ethnic tribe as the unaccompanied minor. The foster homes must be licensed by the state and receive state mandated training through an in-house foster care specialist. Twenty-eight foster homes are currently licensed in the Fargo area, a majority of them culturally and linguistically appropriate homes.

Services and resources from a wide variety of agencies are in place to assist the youth and the families where they live in order to provide wraparound care for them as they attempt to deal with the horrific trauma of their past and the totally unknown environment they now find themselves in. After school tutoring, computer training, independent living training, and mental health care

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From the State Office



By Don Snyder, Administrator

May is National Foster Care Month, and I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for the work you do caring for North Dakota children and families. By opening your home and heart, you play a vital role in helping children and families in crisis heal.

North Dakota foster families not only provide temporary homes, safety, and nurturing to our children, but they also help birth families by ensuring that children can be safely reunited with them. And, when reunification is not possible, many of our families choose to adopt the children who have been placed in their homes, offering permanency and stability the children would otherwise not know.

Your commitment leaves an indelible mark on generations to come. You are helping to end cycles of neglect, abuse and/or drug addiction and are often helping a child be the first in his or her family to finish high school or even go to college. Children leave your home knowing there are many other paths in life than what they've known.

I know you don't get nearly enough thanks or recognition for your efforts but I appreciate all you do and wanted you to know. And although all the children you've helped don't always tell you, their lives have been changed forever having known and been helped by you.

Thank you for sharing your family and your home, giving love, encouragement, and hope to children and families in need.



Governor Hoeven signs proclamation declaring May "Children's Foster Care Month." L to R front: Trudy Schoemaker, Gov. John Hoeven, Jeff Schoemaker. Back Row: Don Snyder, Rita Weisz, Brenda McNally, Steven, and Roger Redfield.



— State of —
North Dakota
Office of the Governor
John Hoeven
Governor

PROCLAMATION
CHILDREN'S FOSTER CARE MONTH
MAY 2004

WHEREAS, children are our most precious and valuable resource, and by investing in them, we secure their futures as well as the future of our state; and

WHEREAS, North Dakota citizens recognize with appreciation individuals who provide shelter, safety and well-being to North Dakota's foster children; and

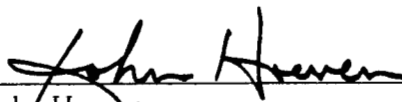
WHEREAS, North Dakota children in family foster homes are provided with safe, secure and stable homes along with the compassion and nurturing of a foster family; and

WHEREAS, North Dakota children are receiving foster care in residential settings with dedicated staff providing care, guidance and stability; and


WHEREAS, foster parents and facility staff provide children with an environment to help them become mature, responsible, productive adults; and

WHEREAS, the needs of North Dakota's foster children will continue to be met by private and public efforts, and foster parents and residential staff are recognized for the vital role they play in the lives of our youth; and

NOW, THEREFORE, as the Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim May 2004, **CHILDREN'S FOSTER CARE MONTH** in the state of North Dakota.


John Hoeven
Governor

ATTEST:


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Children and Family Services Training Center *Celebrates their 20th Anniversary*

With humble beginnings on the 6th floor of the old St. Michael's Hospital, (now the University of North Dakota Medical School), and a staff of two, today the Children and Family Services Training Center (CFSTC) has become an integral part of the child welfare system in North Dakota. The current staff of five personnel hosted an open house April 2, at their current location in Gillette Hall on the campus of the University of North Dakota, to commemorate twenty years of providing training and support services to a wide variety of child welfare agencies and staff members. Among those in attendance were: Roger Johnson, the first director of the Training Center; Dr. Ken Dawes, former Chair of the Department of Social Work at UND and considered one of the "founding fathers" of CFSTC; Dr. Charles Kupchella, President of the University of North Dakota; and, many friends, colleagues and former employees of the Training Center.



I to r: Michelle MacIntosh (former employee); Kathy Newman (Administrative Assistant) Del Hager (Training Coordinator); Pete Tunseth (Director); and, Roger Johnson (the first Director of CFSTC).



I to r: Dr. Ralph Woehle, UND Department of Social Work; Pete Tunseth, Director of CFSTC; and, Dr. Ken Dawes, former Chair of the Department of Social Work and one of the founders of CFSTC.

The Mission of CFSTC is to:

- design and provide child welfare related training opportunities for practitioners;
- serve as an advocate for child welfare related initiatives and programs;
- serve as a resource center concerning child welfare training materials and issues; and
- provide consultation in the area of child welfare practice and administration.

Funding for the Training Center comes from the Children and Family Services Division of the Department of Human Services. Pete Tunseth is the current director of CFSTC. Paul Ronningen heads the CFS Division and Gladys Cairns is the CFS administrator with responsibility to oversee CFSTC training activities. Carol Olson is the DHS Director.

Additional information can be obtained by calling CFSTC at 701-777-3442. A website is being developed at www.cfstc.und.edu that will be fully operational in the near future. Links from www.discover.nd.org through the CFS Division also contain Training Center information.

Lost Boys of Sudan

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are some of the key programs they utilize. One case manager stated that the boys have a certain fear or “stigma of mental health” in that they often say, “I’m not crazy.” At the same time, they need to deal with issues around death, loss, separation, culture shock, uncertainty about their future and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Permanency planning is held twice per year.

Fuglestad indicated that LSSND has had unaccompanied minors from countries around the world including Sudan, Sierra Leone, Congo, Liberia, Bosnia, Croatia, Viet Nam and Haiti. Recruitment of foster families to meet the unique needs of this population is always an ongoing process. In a recruitment message, Fuglestad stated: “What an opportunity for someone who wants more significance in their life. It’s a chance to impart love, meaning, values, nurture and stability to someone who has not previously known these necessary elements - and the minors respond incredibly.”

Anyone interested in becoming a foster parent for a refugee, should contact Katie Behrend, URM foster care specialist, at 701-271-1642. Online information can be obtained at www.lssnd.org/program21.html. An internet search of Lost Boys of Sudan will also reveal scores of fascinating and touching stories.

A Recipe for Disaster or Providence on Legs?

By Paul Fuglestad

It’s hard enough being a teenager, no matter what country or culture you come from. It has been said that more life changes occur between years 13 and 18 than the entire rest of our lives combined. And for some, life’s menu has offered only one entrée - wrought with unanticipated challenges. Take for example, early loss of parents, the severe trauma of war, years of ongoing hardship, overwhelming isolation and total deprivation. But that’s not all.

Now add to the mix, acute dislocation from your family and friends, forced displacement from your village and homeland; a complete loss of identity. Combine this with ethnic prejudice and racial hatred, psychosocial abuse and maltreatment and don’t forget to add plenty of post-traumatic

stress. Let this simmer for a number of years in the oven of time.

This *dish* is simply called the “Unaccompanied Refugee Minor” (URM)

Now remove from the oven and place on the table of America - the sudden intrusive advent of a new *alien* culture, an unintelligible language, an ocean of *colorless* people, an ever changing (and inhospitable) climate, a multitude of unexplainable laws, a host of foreign values; in short, a totally unfamiliar way of life. Fear, confusion, depression might get the best of us.

So, what would YOU call such a personal *recipe*? A “disaster ready to happen”?

We at Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota - Center for New Americans simply call this divine phenomenon a URM - Unaccompanied Refugee MIRACLE.

Needless to say, each youth in our program is a wonder to behold. Sure they struggle. What teenage kid doesn’t? Our Program minors are ‘over comers’. Each youth is a marvel of the Most High; Providence on legs. One would marvel at the strength of character at the inner person. Each minor is engraved with spiritual maturity and etched with ‘soulful’ *muscle* beyond their years.

Here are the seasoned veterans of life in 16 and 17 year old bodies. There is depth of wisdom and character of which only our pioneering forbearers knew. A glance into their eyes would tell you these are more than survivors, they are victors. Adult children, full of humor, grateful smiles, hearty laughter and uncompromising hope. Sure they still struggle. Who doesn’t? But they are living, breathing testimonies of endurance and fortitude that cannot be explained in the natural.

And each of them has embraced our America. They have so much to offer. The question begs us, “Will we Americans embrace them?” Oh, they’ll survive; history is proof of that. Plus, they have angels on their side. But ‘will they *flourish*?’ remains the unanswered question. This may be up to you.

(Paul Fuglestad is the Director of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program at the Center for New Americans, Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota, Fargo.)

President’s Corner

The president of the North Dakota Foster Parent Association did not submit an article for this issue.



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